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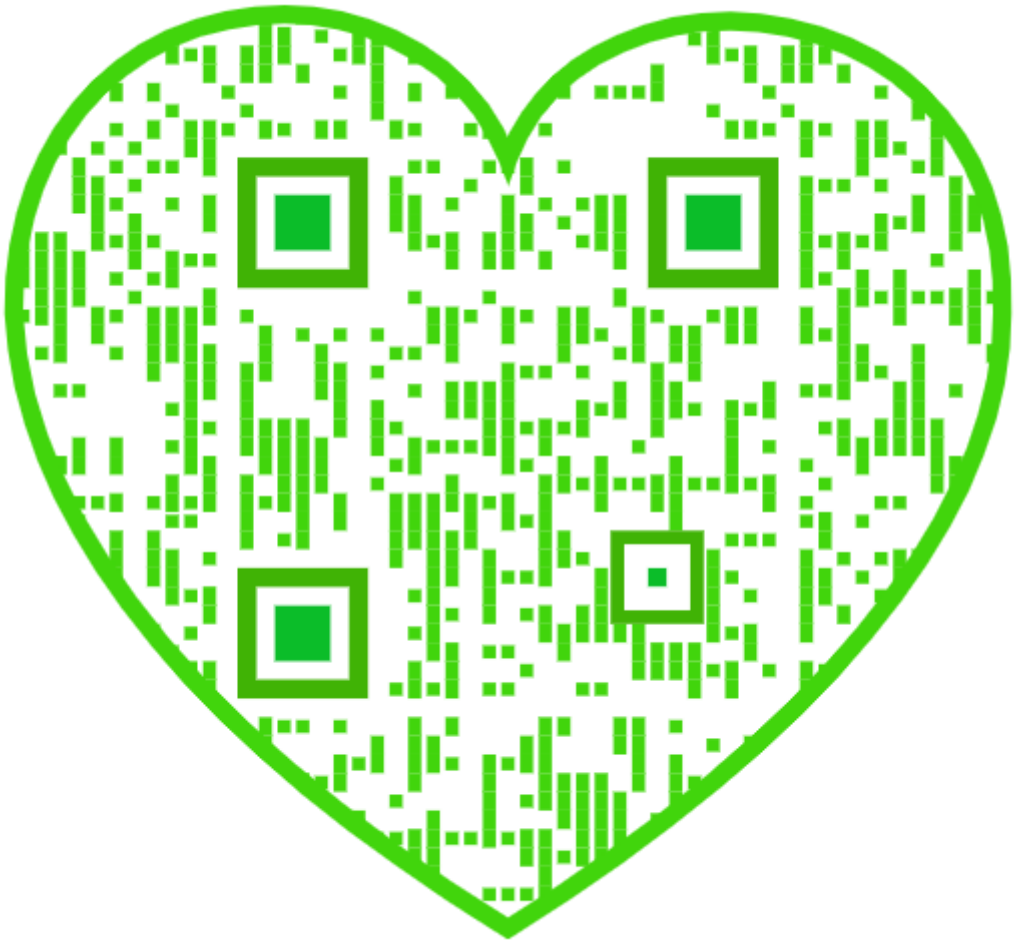

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THE

HAND-BOOK

OF

TASTE

IN

BOOK-BINDING.

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"Me duce tutus eris"—*Ovid.*

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THE

HAND-BOOK

OF

TASTE IN BOOKBINDING.

It would be foreign to the purpose of this little treatise, were I to detail the history, or to discuss the art of Bookbinding. My object is rather to speak of it as connected with taste; to point out the various anomalies that are most frequent in it, and to assist the book-collector in forming a correct judgment on such matters. So numerous are these incongruities, that to detail one half of them would be to tax too severely the indulgence of my readers. How often do we see a sober prose work tricked out with the poetical embellishment of a lyre; the Commentaries of Cæsar ornamented with the Gothic devices of the twelfth century; a Life of Alexander decorated with the arch, though the arch was a thing altogether unknown to the Greeks; or the biography of a Pope Leo blazoned with designs that have been borrowed from Moorish architecture, while perhaps close beside it stands a work on the Alhambra in the primitive plainness of simple golden

lines, a modern history with Egyptian embellishments, or a treatise on gunnery, made quite fine and fantastic, with Egyptian and Moresco? Surely books, like their readers, or the persons they treat of, should be dressed in their appropriate costume.

Even those who would seem to have allowed this principle, have not always agreed as to the way in which it should be carried out. Some have thought that the ornaments of the binding should belong to the *era in which the book was written;* others have maintained that they should be appropriate to the *time of which it treats;* or, to make all plain by an example, that a History of Greece should be bound with Grecian ornaments, though composed by an author of our own century. And surely the latter notion is the most consonant to reason and good taste; the age of the author is nothing to the reader; the subject of the work is everything.

I have already disclaimed all idea of entering into any explanation of the mechanical process of bookbinding, or of giving the history of the art; for the subject, though sufficiently curious to those who delight in such matters, would to the many have, I fear, little interest; but still it may not be out of place to say a few words upon the different modes used to preserve manuscripts, before the adoption of the mode of bookbinding now in use.

At first, all records were engraved on stone or brass; but passing over these matters we come to

the roll, called by the Romans *volumen*, which was made of papyrus, parchment, or vellum, and often consisted of so many pieces as to form a roll of fifty feet in length, or I should rather say in breadth, for the pieces were attached to the side of each other, and every one being written upon separately, and forming, as it were, a distinct page, the whole was unrolled from left to right, as the reader proceeded with his task. Sometimes these rolls exceeded even the limit just mentioned; in the British Museum, for instance, is a papyrus roll, which is generally said to measure more than a hundred feet, the length of one of these rolls being in fact the same thing as the term thickness when applied to a modern volume.

These ancient books were bound, if we may be allowed such a term, by being attached at each end to a cylinder of wood on which they were rolled, while to the cylinders was affixed a handle, for the convenience of unrolling them when required. It was upon this handle that the binder displayed his skill in ornament, just as he would now do upon the back of a volume. The cover was formed by a piece of vellum, fastened to the end of the roll. The titles were sometimes nothing more than a label attached to the cylinders, and hanging down like the seals of our modern legal documents; while at others they were written on leather, and glued to the outside of the roll; in this latter case they were often richly gilt, and gave to a library much the appearance of a modern collection.

These rolls, however, were used by the ancient scholar only for his larger and more elaborate works; for occasional purposes he employed *pugillaria*, or table-books, which were made of wood or metal, in square plates, covered with a thin coating of wax, and tied together with ribbon. The convenience of this square form led by degrees to its being generally adopted in almost every species of writing, and hence in time came the modern volume. The next advance was the addition of a piece of parchment for a cover, and this being found an insufficient protection, led to the use of wood for a binding. The succeeding steps in the art must have developed themselves readily enough. Having once found the necessity of a substantial cover, it required no great stretch of invention to hide the rude material under leather, parchment, or vellum, and this step would naturally in a little time be followed by the discovery of a substitute for the board itself; but the taste in the ornamental part by no means kept pace with the other improvements; and, by the time of the invention of printing, the binder's art had attained to a degree of elaborate bad taste, quite equal to anything in our own days.

From numerous passages in the classic writers, we learn that the Greeks and Romans used many coloured leathers to cover their books, and ornamented them highly, with especial regard to the character of each work. From them we pass to the state of the art in England. The *Textus Sanctus Cuthberti* in

the Cottonian library, written by Eadfrid, Bishop of Durham, and illumined by Ethelwold, was bound in leather, and adorned with gold and silver plates set with jewels. At this period the learning and arts of the country were chiefly confined to the monks, and the earliest name that has reached our time, is that of Biefied, a monk of the Abbey of Durham, who lived about A.D. 720. In those days, at every abbey was a room devoted to the purposes of transcribing, illuminating, and binding manuscripts. For a long time wooden covers were in general use, and to this practice may be attributed the loss of many valuable works, for the worm was almost sure to attack volumes bound in this fashion. Much time, however, and labour, appear to have been bestowed upon them; they were often embellished with scenes illustrative of the book, while, to protect them from injury during use, they were strengthened and guarded by metal bosses and corners. To these also, were generally added clasps, upon which for the most part the arms of the owner were enamelled. Of such bindings not a few were made of deer-skin, and sometimes they were of velvet, ornamented on the side with jewels.

It was not uncommon for the missals of this period to be most elaborately ornamented with drawings, but with such a mixture of good and bad taste as might be expected from the general rudeness of the monkish ages; often while the centre mould contained a beautiful picture in perfect keeping with the

character of the work itself, it would be surrounded with a border of the most incongruous objects.

The invention of printing in the year 1488, gave a new stimulus to literature, and for a time also to the art of binding, which at least deserves the praise of having generally been executed in the firmest and most careful manner. It is to this that we owe the preservation of many valuable works, that otherwise would have been lost to us. Vellum and velvet were now the materials most generally in use for the covers, while the registers and tassels were both of silk, and amongst the rich, the clasps were of gold, or silver, or copper gilt. Nor for a long period does any striking change appear to have taken place; for we find Elizabeth, in the twenty-seventh year of her reign, being presented with a bible, bound in cloth of gold, garnished with silver and gilt, with two plates of the royal arms. In another place, we read how she was presented with Parker's work, *De Antiquitate Ecclesiæ Britannicæ*, which is still in the British Museum, and proves to be bound in green velvet, embroidered on one side with coloured silk and silver thread. There is also a very curious design upon it, representing a park with deer, and a large rose tree in the middle, intended as an anagram on the name of the donor. The back is divided into squares, and partly ornamented with roses, but these compartments are not all ornamented alike, and the lettering is evidently of a later date.

In the same library we find another book belong-

ing to Elizabeth; this is a *Historia Ecclesiæ,* bound in velvet, with a square of crimson silk in the centre, embroidered with the shield of the royal arms in gold and silver thread, and coloured silk. The remaining space is embroidered with roses &c., of the same material.

Damask silk and velvet were also much used about the time of James the First, for the covering of books, as we learn from the *Acta Synodi Dort*, a work which, like those just mentioned, is to be seen in the British Museum, and is considered the most splendid specimen of the style of this period in the kingdom. It is bound in crimson velvet, with the arms of England worked on yellow silk, with gold thread on the sides, the gold being in such close relief as to conceal the silk. The letter J and a crown are embroidered above, and the letter R below, while the rose and thistle occupy the opposite corners. The back has bands of a similar material, with the rose and thistle in alternate squares. But, notwithstanding both of these have been much admired by the connoisseurs in such matters, they do not, so far as I am able to judge, deserve the praise that has been lavished upon them, if we are to compare them with the best specimens of modern excellence.

I have spoken of books covered with vellum and leather, and it seems that as early as the fourteenth century they were ornamented with gold, much after the manner of our own times. Many specimens of the

sixteenth century still exist, and their execution in sharpness, brilliancy, and general perfection, will bear comparison with those of the latest date. Covers of this kind may be found in the British Museum, and occasionally in the old book-shops, but it must be confessed that many of them are so overloaded with ornament, as to present little more than a confused mass of gold.

The changes in the art of binding from the sixteenth century to the present day, are so entirely confined to style, that it will not be necessary for me to enter more minutely into the subject of ancient binding. Suffice it only to observe, that when, through the medium of printing, books became less valuable, as being more easily replaced, less attention was given to the binding; in consequence hereof, from the end of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, it may be said to have made little progress, except that, in the mere mechanical manipulation, the forwarding or preparation showed more neatness; still the finishing, or ornamental part, was in the worst taste, as witness some of the books in the Harleian collection, where trees, birds, ships, and similar objects, are used to embellish works on the most opposite topics. From this period, and during the present age, the art has made great progress, both for good and evil; for good, in the greater beauty of the workmanship; for evil, by the introduction of machinery, to accomplish that which can

be so much better effected by the labour of the human hand.

Having given this preliminary sketch, the next thing is to enter into the details of patterns, so as to enable the reader to select for himself such as he may judge best adapted to the eras of the different volumes in his library.

The materials now in use for the binding of books, are *Morocco*, *Russia*, and *calf* leathers, with silk, velvet, and vellum. It would be useless to describe such well-known articles, or to discuss their applicability to any particular class of work, this being merely a question of price, and not of taste; but it is important to understand the characteristics of a well-bound volume. These are,—that it should open freely and fully, so that the work may be read without any necessity for holding down the pages—that the edges of the boards or covers should be perfectly square, the leather turning over the edges smoothly and without any inequalities—that the leather should be clear and of one uniform colour, free from blotches or any variety of shades—that the end-papers, or papers inside the covers, should be cut so as to leave the same extent of marginal leather all round, and be pasted down evenly, but more particularly at the fold where the book may be said to hinge, which should be perfectly smooth and free from crease—that the gilding of the edges should be smooth, and of an uniform tint—that the tooling on the back and

sides should be sharp and clear, without the least perceptible joining of any one line with another—and that the inside of every gilt-edged book should have a gold line about an eighth of an inch inside, worked all around it, this giving the volume a more elegant finish than any of the flowered rolls generally used for the purpose. I consider this to be a great improvement in the elegance of bookbinding, the rather, perhaps, as it has emanated from my own establishment, and has hitherto been confined to it; one great reason for which may be, that it requires so much precision, as to be utterly worthless, except in the hands of first-rate workmen.

The sides of half-bound books are covered either with cloth or marble paper. The cloth is made of every variety of colour, and should always match the leather. The same remarks may be made in regard to the marble paper, specimens of which I have given on the opposite page.

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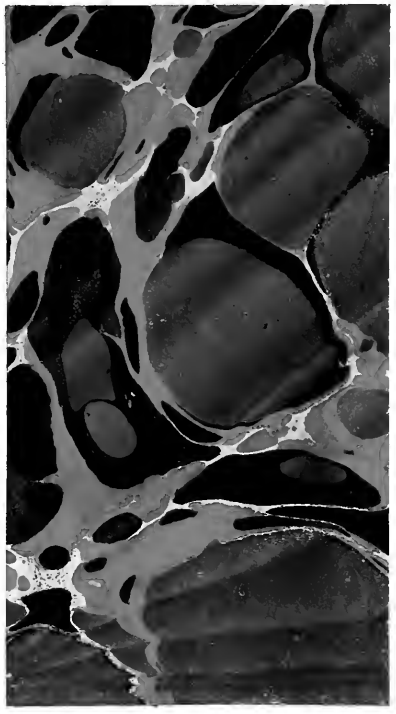

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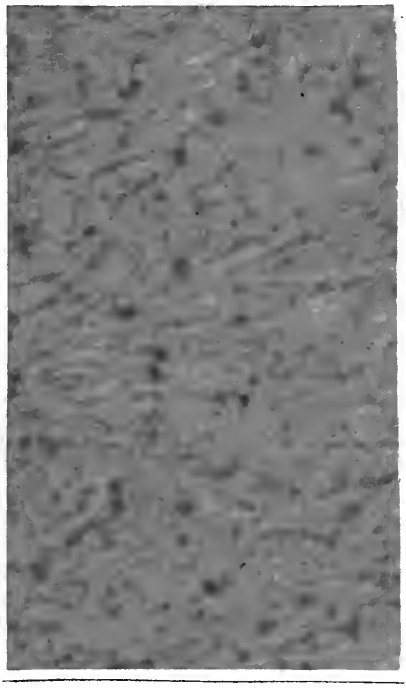


FRENCH.

DUTCH.

EGYPTIAN.

It may be imagined by many readers, that in Egypt we shall find but little illustration of our subject. The very reverse of this is the truth. The walls and ceilings of the Egyptian houses, as described by Wilkinson, were richly painted and frequently in admirable taste, though in the present day we must chiefly judge of their effect from what we find on their tombs, where these devices are much more perfectly preserved. The scarab, the harpy, and several even of the ornamental emblems on Greek and Etruscan vases, are to be met with in these decorations. The principal forms were the lotus, one of the most beautiful objects that could have been selected by taste for ornament, and which at the same time bore a deep emblematic meaning; the reed, the square, the diamond, and the circle; above all, the succession of scrolls and square within square, usually called the Tuscan border, both of which are as of common occurrence on Egyptian vases as on the Greek and Etruscan. The lotus, too, we find repeated in leaf, bud, and blossom, in a great variety of combinations. I have also to notice two other compound ornaments—

The Reed.

The Square.

that is to say, ornaments made up from different natural objects. The first is composed of the wings of birds; the second is an union of various leaves.

In most of these ornaments there is a multiplicity of colours, though blue, and more particularly yellow, seem to be the most predominant. This of course is of no importance to the binder, but it may be a useful hint to those printers who are in the habit of illuminating, or embellishing works with characteristic borders and ornaments. If the colouring be not always in the purest taste, there is yet much in it to dazzle and take the eye, and at all events it is appropriate to the works in question, for the illuminator is proceeding on the best authority, namely, that of the Egyptians themselves.

GRECIAN

WHATEVER might be the size of the Greek buildings, or however varied their ornaments, the same fixed principle was invariably observed, and every subsequent addition or improvement was made in strict harmony with this law. Following the example thus given to us, I should prefer ornamenting all works of Greece, or on Grecian topics, in the square, or panelled style; indeed, as the arch was unused by the Greeks, and therefore probably unknown to them, I consider all curved ornaments,—if we except the

volutes, or imitative ram's-horn, adopted in the Ionic capitals,—to be perfectly out of place. The use of panels allows us to introduce a variety of ornaments, and in the remains of Greek architecture, we find models in abundance.

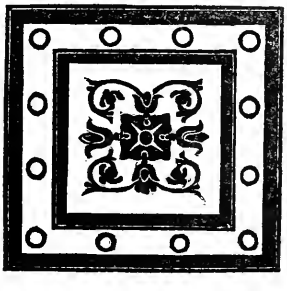
Those most frequently employed, are the honeysuckle (an ornament of great delicacy and beauty in the hands of a skilful artist, though liable to degenerate when used with less judgment) and the lotus, which are used either separately, or combined as rolls, and garlands of flowers

selected and put together with all that purity of taste, for which the Greeks were at one time so justly

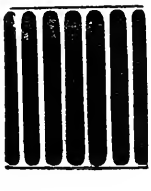
celebrated; and fruits, horns of animals, shells, vases, cups, instruments of sacrifice, lyres, tripods, griffins, and leaves of the *acanthus*, or bears' breech. For rolls we may borrow the *gutta*, representing drops, a small ornament from the Doric entablature, or the Guilloche, which I cannot better describe than as being a succession of circles, running chain-like within each other; or we may adopt, and this too is exceedingly beautiful, a fillet in imitation of basket-work. For the back we may use a panel ornamented in the centre, thus

Greek Cup.

Acanthus.

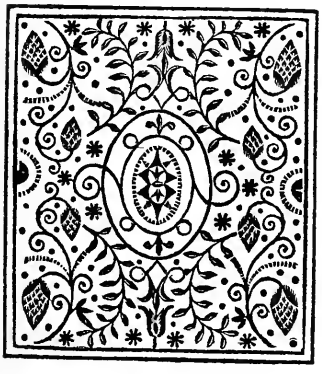


or lastly, the squares may be filled up with flutes as in a column, thus



ROMAN.

The Romans may be said to have borrowed nearly everything in art from Greece, the arch being the only exception of importance, and this with them was always a complete semicircle. We may therefore, in binding Roman works, use any Grecian ornaments, as well as patterns made of curved lines, only taking care that they form portions of a circle. In later times, however, the Romans fell into a more vicious, or at least a more florid, style of ornament;



as witness their Encaustic tiles, and incongruous combinations of animal and vegetable life. This style has often been termed *arabesque*; but, it should seem, with very little propriety, since the Arabs are prohibited by their religion from representing any forms of animal life.

FROM THE THIRD TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

The early Christians adopted many of the Pagan religious emblems, while they attributed to them another meaning. Thus they borrowed from the feasts of Bacchus his vine, with the Genii sporting amongst its tendrils, and made them symbolize the labours of the faithful in Christ's vineyard; the palm-branch, which had before been the emblem of worldly victories, was by them held to denote the triumph of the Cross; the dove of Venus was used to typify the Holy Ghost; the stag of Diana denoted the Christian thirsting for the living waters; and Juno's peacock, under the name of the phœnix, emblematized the same soul after the resurrection.

The Cross used in the early times was usually of two kinds; the Greek, which had all its arms of the same length, as may be seen in the example given, and the Latin, which had its stem much larger than the bar, or upper portion. These Crosses, however, were seldom displayed openly, being for the most part buried under vine leaves and poppies, so as to

afford but little indication of their real nature. It was not till the sixth century that the cross assumed the form of a rood—that is to say, when to the cross was affixed the figure of Christ crucified. The Lamb was used to represent a Christian; twelve denoted the apostles; and a thirteenth, adorned by a nimbus, was our Saviour.

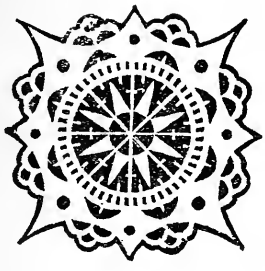
Now all these types and emblems may with propriety be used to ornament the bindings of missals or early religious tracts, though some exercise of good taste is requisite in the selection. Or we may use a

chalice, which, as a sacred implement, would be no less adapted to the same class of writings. It must be observed, however, that the chalice in question differs much in form from the Grecian cup, which will be evident enough to the reader upon comparing the specimens of either that I have here given.

Works on the North of Africa, or Turkey, or on Spain, only to the time of the Arabian conquest,

should be bound in the Arabian or Moresque style, which in some degree combines the Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman details, with a yet closer approach to our Gothic. Specimens of this kind may be seen on the ceilings of some buildings that are still standing, copies of which may be found in many of our popular works on architecture. Of these I have transferred

so much to my pages as is necessary, to our present purpose.



GOTHIC.

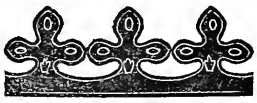
Assuming as correct the name of Gothic, a point which may be disputed, but which it is now unnecessary to discuss, we may observe that Gothic architecture was divided by the Italians into several classes; that which prevailed in the north of Italy they called *Lombard Gothic*; that which prevailed on the north of the Alps they called *German Gothic*; and that in Spain and other countries they termed *Arabic* or *Moorish Gothic.* In England different styles came into use at different periods; the features of each being distinctly marked, we have hence three various kinds of Gothic, known as the *Saxon and Norman Gothic*, *the Full or Simple Gothic*, and the *Florid Gothic.* Some, however, consider the *Norman* as distinct from the *Saxon*, and divide that which succeeded, under the general name of Gothic, into the LANCET-ARCH *Gothic*, the COMPLETE *Gothic*, the ORNAMENTAL *Gothic*, and the FLORID *Gothic*, though the *Norman* seems in reality to be no more than a modification of the Saxon, and it has been considered as such by many able writers.

With these data before us, we come to a few simple rules as to the ornaments appropriate to each parti-

cular period. Works that relate to the eleventh and twelfth century should be bound plainly, and even

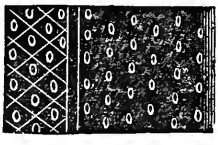
massively; those of a later date should be lighter and more ornamented, as shown in the accompanying roll;

We also frequently find single flowers, the effect of which is exceedingly pleasing to the eye in binding, when chosen with taste and executed with the requisite degree of neatness, and rows of stars. The chalice, too, as a church utensil, may also be used.

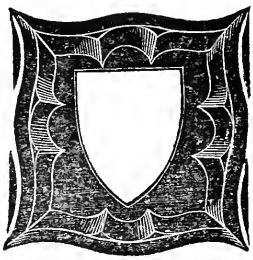
The Gothic architecture of the two following centuries, although described by Mr. Whewel as a style that has lost all traces of classical proportion, abounds so in ornaments, and those of the most elegant kind, that we may draw from it a great variety of designs. For borders we have the crest-tiles of Exeter Cathedral,  (now corruptly called *cress-tiles* and *crease-tiles*, used to cover the ridge of a roof, upon which they are fixed saddle-like); and the mould

ings in Southwell Minster, as well as at Bloxam, Addesbury, Glastonbury, and Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire.

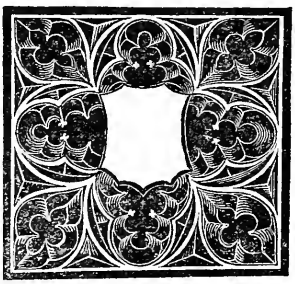
For centre ornaments, or, I may indeed say, for the whole side of the book, we shall find an excellent model in a costume of 1399,



as well as in the carvings and panels of some of the old monuments,



The backs of the volumes may with much propriety, be ornamented in the same way as the sides.



In process of time all the purer forms of Gothic architecture had sadly degenerated, and in the reign

of Elizabeth we come upon a mixed style, at once heavy yet elaborate, that has by some writers been called *Anglo-Italian;* add to these principal characteristics the introduction of men and animals grotesquely featured, panels surrounded with the most intricate ornaments,

and corners made up of birds, with heavy embellishments in the centre. But however vicious this style may be in our eyes, it is quite clear that Shakspeare and the other writers of the period should be bound in the fashion that was peculiar to it. For the same reason, all works of the puritanical age, that so soon succeeded it, should be bound as plainly as possible, to accord with what every one knows to have been the humour—it can hardly be called taste—of the period.

The style of Louis XIV., like our own Elizabethean, was anything but pure, being at once both heavy and fantastic. It has been called *Style de la Renaissance.*

MODERN.

We have thus seen, though in a very cursory way, the origin and progress of book-binding, as also the various modes of ornament applied to it, up to the present time. In regard to modern book-binding, little more remains than to repeat what has been already said, for the whole mystery is within a narrow compass. Some few general rules may be given, as suggesting hints to guide the taste of the purchaser. Thus, for instance, works upon religious topics would seem to require a sobriety of embellishment, as being more in harmony with their character than ornaments of a lighter kind. The decorations should not only be few and simple, but executed in what is technically called *blind tooling*, that is to say, without any gold; or if gold be employed at all, it should be confined to the edges of the cover, or panel, while the whole of the centre is left blind. History and biography, if we adopt this principle, may be less gravely embellished than religious works, but still should have weight and solidity of decoration, so far as the phrase can be applied with propriety to anything in the way of ornament. Poetry, and fiction in general, would be most characteristically dressed in a light, elegant, and graceful binding, except, indeed, as regards tra-

gedy, which, with due respect for Melpomene, should be clothed in what our old dramatists would have called *sad* ornaments. Perhaps, too, it may not be pushing too far this notion of harmony between the outside and the inside of every work, if we say that the lives of the Roundheads should be as grave and as little ornamented as we know their habits were, while their gay antagonists, the Cavaliers, should be as brilliant as the art of the binder can well make them. It is possible that many may think I am carrying out this principle, as extravagantly as Sheridan's Bob Acres did his ideas of sentimental swearing, when he insisted that every oath should have a strict reference to the subject of the swearer; but still, if the notion be right at all, it must be right altogether, and in fact it is but the same principle that, though not always acted upon, is yet uniformly allowed to be a just one in regard to building and costume. I should not myself, therefore, hesitate to carry it out rigidly to its full extent, and would even say that the bindings should not only assimilate with the taste of the time of which the work treats, but that the colour should also be in harmony with its subject.

It would at first sight seem somewhat inconsistent with the rules laid down, that we should embellish the binding of a modern author, and upon a modern subject, with Greek or Roman ornaments. But this is a necessity growing out of the very narrow limits of human invention, or, it may be, of the forms on which that invention had to work. Certain it is, that

all the ingenuity of our artists of every description, has not been able to add a single combination to those invented by the Greeks and Romans, and even they appear to be only modifications of the old Egyptian. In modern binding, therefore, we consider the whole range of ancient embellishment as being equally appropriate to our time, only taking care to associate the grave with the grave, the light with the light, and the fanciful with the fanciful, according to the suggestions already given. Let me be excused for so frequently repeating this fundamental principle of the art, since of all others it is the most neglected. The moment any ornament has been brought forward that at all catches the public taste, the binders for the most part snatch at it with avidity, and employ it on all occasions, right or wrong, till it is superseded by some new combination from the store-house of antiquity. This is more particularly the case with the binders in cloth; a moresque tool is cut for a work on the Arabian dynasty, when forthwith they transfer it to the cover of a volume on the Cathedrals of England: or a crimson cloth is with propriety adopted for a life of Wellington, and soon after we find it covering a biography of Bishop Heber.

I hardly know whether it is necessary to dwell any longer upon this topic, but to avoid all possibility of mistake, I will venture to add a few farther illustrations. For example, I would bind a French Military History in blue and an English one in scarlet. I would not ornament a Life of Nelson with the sails

of a ship, but as the base of the Nelson pillar is composed of a hawser, so I would let my *rolls* be in imitation of cable, with perhaps a couple of boarding pikes crossed in the centre of the square.

The cable makes a very beautiful *roll or fillet*, and is quite as applicable as an ornament for the bookbinder, as it is as an article of jewellery for a lady's neck. I would bind a treatise on the celestial bodies in cerulean blue with stars and crescents; a botanical work in green with a flowery border; while I would tool an Euclid in squares, triangles, circles, and rhomboids, but without any flowery ornaments; and ornament a Moore's Irish Melodies with leaves of flowers, either in wreaths or in borders, with the Irish harp in the centre. Works relating to India would seem to be most fitly embellished with the vegetable and animal productions of the country; or if the subject be historical or of ancient date, appropriate ornaments may be found in the sculpture and architecture of the Hindu race. Fluted pilasters, the zodiac, and figures of various kind, belonging either to their religion or their history, form the principal features to be borrowed for the purposes of the binder. It may be difficult to determine any exact style in which Encyclopædias and other serials treating of all subjects and all times

should be bound; I would, however, suggest, that ornaments which have stood the longest may be used with greater propriety than any of a more modern date; for this reason, I would prefer the Grecian ornamented panel to any other. It would be a waste of the reader's time and patience for me to give more examples of this kind. I trust I have said enough to give a pretty correct notion of my ideas on the subject, and I am sure, if it be carried out, the gentleman's library will present a much more chaste appearance than it would if bound in the indiscriminate and thoughtless style of the present day.

Other considerations now force themselves upon our attention, of more substantial importance than the good or bad taste of the binding. No book is fit to be bound till the ink has become fixed, or, as the printers term it, *set*, by time; when attention is not paid to this very essential rule, the print is apt to fly off, and the ink of one page to be transferred to that which presses on it, to the entire disfigurement of the volume, if indeed it is not in many places rendered well nigh illegible. This is more particularly the case with cloth bindings, which are too often submitted to the action of the binder's press the moment they have been brought from the printing office. To me, this constant recurrence of such an evil forms one of the great objections to cloth-binding, for most assuredly it did not happen in the old boarded system, when the bookseller bought his works in sheets, and left them in his warehouse till

wanted for sale, or till the ink had become sufficiently set by time. Nor is this the only defect inherent to the system of cloth-binding; the whole edition being at once bound with the same ornaments and in the same colour, the purchaser has no choice left to him; whatever his taste may be, he must take the work as he finds it, or go to the expense of having it bound anew; in addition to which, such bindings are for the most part rickety, and fall to pieces when they come to be much handled.

[The publisher of this little treatise invites an inspection of his book of patterns, arranged in eras according to the rules he has laid down.]

THE END.

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